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## LORD MORLEY'S RELATION TO HISTORY, TO THEOLOGY, AND TO THE CHURCHES

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When a statesman and writer approaching his seventy-ninth birthday gives to the world two volumes of *Recollections* he may be taken as having intimated that his public career is over, and that estimates of his significance may begin to be formed. This *Journal* is no place in which to consider Lord Morley as a politician, and it may well be doubted whether this aspect of his work can yet be judged anywhere with complete fairness. He lived and moved amid fierce contentions, and their record has so far been given us only by those contemporary men whose interest was strongly enlisted on one side or on another. That soil is perhaps still too hot and too convulsed for the composed tread and unbiased survey of the real historian. Moreover, Lord Morley as he has appeared in state affairs is among those who have most to lose by being estimated too soon. Again and again he has put his personal fame to the hazard for the sake of some project that must take long to justify itself. For his eye has ever been on the distant vision, and it has been a central part of his creed, both in theory and in practice, that those who see beyond their age must make no ignoble compromise with those whose horizon is narrow and whose immediate demands are peremptory. But it is not too soon to consider him from another point of view, and one which in these pages may appropriately be taken. Pierre Proudhon was, in all conscience, a man of sufficiently secular mind, but it was he who declared amid the tempest of French socialism two generations ago that "at the bottom of our politics we always find theology." And Lord Morley himself has recalled to us more than once how Ernest Renan on his visit to Jerusalem saw Turkish soldiers on guard by the Holy Sepulcher to prevent the two types of Christian enthusiasts from shedding each other's blood on the sacred spot. One cannot

help feeling that the agnostic chief secretary for Ireland viewed his own function in that land of warring creeds under the same ironical light. And partly from such experience, partly from prolonged reflection, he has given us many a view of spiritual matters upon which it is worth our while to dwell.

The present paper will consider Lord Morley as a bookman, and very specially as a bookman who has had his say upon the deepest things of all, at much length and through a long literary career. There is little risk of our judging him too rapidly in this respect. His most important writings are already many years old. Excepting the *Life of Gladstone* and *Recollections* they have been from thirty to forty years before the reading public. And they deal with subjects which one can scarcely hope to become much better able to estimate as time goes on.

## I

Lord Morley has himself defined for us the vocation of the man of letters, a class which he regards, rather arbitrarily perhaps, as having originated in the circle of the French *Encyclopédie*. The world of intellect, we are told, requires not only its creative men but its critics, its appreciators, its popularizers. It is this subordinate office which belongs to literature, and it is by literature that stimulus is given to two precious qualities, breadth of interest and balance of judgment.<sup>1</sup> The man of letters has to "diffuse those fruitful ideas which society is at the time in a condition to assimilate." Lord Morley here describes himself, and he has not exaggerated his own claim. Nothing indeed that he has ever written makes any pretense to be an independent artistic masterpiece. He is not among the creative spirits; not to be named with Rousseau, with Carlyle, or with his own master, John Stuart Mill. His work has been to evaluate, to sift, to help his age in distinguishing dross from pure gold, to separate for us the writing that is significant of much from the writing that is significant of little. But he has always taken this task as a lofty one, and he has made it lofty.

No essayist of his time has had more of the quality which we may call intellectual nutritiousness. A literary estimate by Lord

<sup>1</sup> *Voltaire*, pp. 107-8; cf. *Diderot*, chap. ii.

Morley conveys what is worth more than any mere facts or judgments on the special subject of which it treats. As Emerson said of the work of another, the sentiment that it instils is of more value than any thought that it contains,<sup>1</sup> for it sets a pattern by which the reader may learn how to form such estimates for himself with insight. In no one do we find greater fidelity to that golden rule of criticism, so finely stated yet so systematically disregarded by Carlyle, that he who has not appreciated the degree of truth in the man he criticizes is thereby disqualified from detecting the degree of his error. It is just because Lord Morley has observed this principle with such resoluteness, even in cases where his personal bias must have been hardest to restrain, that his literary work has been so penetrating and so educative. Compare, for example, his generous tribute to the Jesuit teachers of the eighteenth century<sup>2</sup> with the wholesale diatribe against that order in Carlyle's *Latter Day Pamphlets*. One could scarcely say which critic was farther removed, both by temperament and by opinion, from Ignatius Loyola. But it is easy to say which has shown the more judicial mind. It is not surprising to learn from *Recollections* that many a growl was heard in the agnostic set of the *Fortnightly Review* because the editor published so sympathetic an account of men like Joseph de Maistre, acknowledging both a subtlety of mind and a sincere loftiness of purpose in those who led the French Catholic reaction after the return of the Bourbons. Or take such a group of articles as those on Turgot, Machiavelli, Macaulay, George Eliot, Cardinal Newman. With what lucidity and with how admirable a sense of proportion is the reader shown how to seize in each case the central significance, how to keep detail in true perspective, how to think himself in turn into the intellectual climate within which each of these so different figures moved, how to ask and sincerely to answer the question wherein lay the strength and wherein the weakness of each. Where will one obtain a sounder discipline in the mental attitude with which the great movements and the great men of the past should be approached? One need not agree with a single judgment that his critical guide has pronounced. But one cannot fail to acquire from him as by

<sup>1</sup> Essay on "Self-Reliance."

<sup>2</sup> *Diderot*, p. 17.

contagion that detachment from prejudice, that historical and objective way of looking at persons, that hospitality toward elements of value from every quarter, through which alone an intelligent and a just estimate may be reached. That he should have conspicuously helped to form this habit in the reading public is the highest glory of a "man of letters," and Lord Morley is entitled to it in a very special degree.

Mr. H. G. Wells has somewhere declared that the sole justification for writing is "poetic gift—the gift of the creative and illuminating phrase." A strict formula perhaps, and one that would condemn some writers whom we could ill spare. It would be hard, for example, to find a place within it for Professor Bury or Professor Saintsbury. But it would make room at once for the authorship of Lord Morley. When he is at his best he is a master of the *callida iunctura*, the phrase that grips the mind and gains in significance the longer we reflect upon it, the vivid, arresting collocation of words into which thought is packed close, and by which far more is suggested than is actually said. One may quote just a few illustrations. Many have said it since, but it was Lord Morley who first said that Carlyle had "compressed the golden Gospel of Silence into thirty fine volumes."<sup>1</sup> It was he who spoke of the "luminous haze that made the Coleridgean atmosphere."<sup>2</sup> It was he who warned the shallower sort of Emersonian that "a platitude is not turned into a profundity by being dressed up as a conundrum."<sup>3</sup> And it was he who declared, with a piercing truth which most of us are reluctant to admit, that liberty owes at least as much to the mutual hate of the Christian factions as charity owes to their mutual love.<sup>4</sup> The fastidious in style may, for aught I know, see much to criticize in Lord Morley. But the reader who seeks to be instructed must welcome the trenchancy, the limpid directness, the virile and even pugnacious emphasis of a man who always has his own thought clearly before him, and to whom language is but the mobile instrument of ideas.

Though he has the gift of an epigrammatist, our author has never aspired to the poor fame of a coiner of *bons mots*. His atti-

<sup>1</sup> *Misc.*, "On Carlyle."

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, "On Emerson."

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> *Rousseau*, II, 17.

tude to his age is above all apostolic. From his first article to his final *Recollections* he is a man with a moral and spiritual message. If he writes about the past it is to cast light on the present, if he analyzes the thought of a Machiavelli or a Montesquieu it is to fit us all for estimating the policy of living statesmen, if he sets before us the France of Turgot and Vauvenargues it is to elicit general laws of human nature and general rules of state wisdom. Many a reader of his *Voltaire* must have been astonished at the paragraph in which he complains that no sense of what is called "holiness" entered into the manifold endowments of the sage of Ferney.<sup>1</sup> Yet there is no occasion for surprise. Whether the gospel according to John Stuart Mill is capable of being suffused with holiness may perhaps be doubted. But if this can be done, Mill's favorite disciple was the man to do it. He more than almost anyone else has introduced a certain flavor of sainthood into the teachings of his harsh rationalistic group. Matthew Arnold thought religion was no more than an emotional coloring of morality, and in this sense Lord Morley is as nearly religious as a man can be who looks back to Bentham as one founder of his cult. He admits as a sort of personal weakness that in the highest eloquence he always expects the element of "unction." Hence his sympathetic attachment to men from whom intellectually he was separated wide as the poles—a Bossuet, a Lacordaire, a Newman, even a Chateaubriand.

Of a truth there has been at times abundance of unction in Lord Morley's own rhetoric. It may be worth while to illustrate this at some length from the fiery little volume in which, forty years ago, he showed how the enthusiasm of unbelief may be as radiant as the enthusiasm of faith. From the editorial chair of the *Fortnightly Review* he was directing a campaign against English religion. In the notable band of his lieutenants were such men as Leslie Stephen, George Meredith, Cotter Morrison, and T. H. Huxley. The champions on each side are now almost all gone, and the old battle cries are well forgotten. That was the period, now so long behind us, when archbishops were baited about the Six Days, and biologists made merry over the Gadarene swine.

<sup>1</sup> *Voltaire*, p. 227.

The curious may still recognize the same obsolete pugnaciousness if they look at an article by Sir Edwin Ray Lancaster, whom Professor Pringle-Pattison has described with such aptness as "a doughty survivor from the wars of last century."<sup>1</sup> But one feature of the conflict is still worth reviving. We read in *Recollections* that during 1877 not a month passed in which the pages of the *Fortnightly* did not riddle with criticism some central doctrine of the Christian faith. The purpose of the articles was twofold: first, to expose as fundamentally superstitious the leading tenets of Christian theology, and secondly, to denounce as dishonest the timid reticence of those unbelievers who failed to proclaim from the housetops just what they thought about the creed of their fellow-countrymen.

It was this second aim which Lord Morley made specially his own, and the papers he contributed were afterward brought together in the book called *On Compromise*. It was a manifesto on behalf of intellectual candor and unflinching plainness of speech. The English public, as the author saw it, was in two respects grievously insincere. Its clergy signed a creed which was remote in many cases from their genuine belief, and which, as fettering free inquiry for the future, should, he thought, in no case be signed by any candid man. Laymen who in the privacy of their own souls held no creed whatever were at pains to disguise their actual attitude and even pretended, for the sake of its good moral influence, a zealous adhesion to traditional dogma. We know this problem only too well. It is that of church formulas and the limits of permissible concealment—an old problem indeed, at least as old as the time when Socrates vowed the cock to Aesculapius, and Cicero inspected the entrails of a chicken according to the rule of the college of augurs. Lord Morley decides the casuistical point with sharpness. Compromise may be the life of politics, but elsewhere it is treason to truth.<sup>2</sup> By what means can mankind be led forward from darkness to light or from a dimmer light to a clearer if we must forever accommodate our words to the general taste, deal in cunning equivocation lest we wound our neighbor's sensitiveness, beware of the

<sup>1</sup> *The Idea of God* (Gifford Lectures), p. 163.

<sup>2</sup> *On Compromise*, pp. 19, 20.

"high" and hold fast to the "safe"?<sup>1</sup> Why sacrifice a permanent social gain to an immediate comfort and make a virtue out of intellectual cowardice? Truth itself was everywhere falling into disrepute. The superiority of one conviction to another was scarcely admitted. The flippant skeptic was reinforcing the intolerant orthodox and nourishing the same cynical contempt for straightforwardness of mind. Dogmatic assertion on the one hand was met with "giggling epigrams" on the other, until mutually hostile views were thought of as merely interesting, like the mutually hostile beasts in a menagerie.<sup>2</sup>

The chief vials of our author's indignation, however, were poured out upon the signatories to a creed. For his own part he would have the world know that he was not to be called a doubter. He rejected "positively, absolutely, and without reserve the whole current belief of the day in one and all of its theological expressions."<sup>3</sup> But his charge against the clergy was that their creed, whether true or false, was stereotyped for all time. The creed-bound man had taken a pledge that he would seek truth no more. The system that encouraged him was like a civil polity which should penalize an industrial invention and load with bounties the steadfast adherent to an antiquated method;<sup>4</sup> and the tampering with veracity had begun to bring forth its inevitable results. "Broad" churchmen, though fully cognizant of the desolating effect of criticism, yet consented for the sake of material ease and social prestige to go through life masked and gagged. Those dwelling in the tower of ancient faiths were looking about them in constant apprehension, misgiving, and wonder, with the hurried, uneasy mien of people living amid earthquakes.<sup>5</sup> Why not have the fortitude and the manlike resolution to prepare for what must come? A new world-outlook must supersede that of Christianity, as Christianity itself had superseded Judaism. The great step, he assures us, is already being taken by a few. It is being taken in pain. As of old, the first outcome must be to send not peace but a sword. Households must be divided against themselves. What ultimate form would in the issue emerge none could yet tell. "For we, like

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 21.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 160, 161.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 37.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 130.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 94.



the Hebrews of old, shall have to live and die in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and being persuaded of them, and embracing them, and confessing that we are strangers and pilgrims on the earth."<sup>1</sup>

This is unctuous enough, and a word will be said of it later. Many will be surprised that Lord Morley should here confirm his own position by citing the authority of Cardinal Newman! Yet his assault on compromise is exactly in the spirit of that famous paragraph in the *Apologia* which depicts the verbal navigators down the channel of No-Meaning as keeping skilfully equidistant from the Scylla of Aye and the Charybdis of No.<sup>2</sup> But might not the bitter words against an equivocating clergy have been applied best of all to that dear friend, Matthew Arnold, of whom so kindly mention is made in *Recollections*, the bold spirit so passionate for preserving the Church of England as by law established, but who at the same time denied even a low degree of probability to the belief in God?

## II

It is as a writer of "lives" that Lord Morley is known to the widest circle, and no doubt he is known best of all by his *Life of Gladstone*. The most famous biography in the world was written by an extremely stupid man, and the smart aphorists tell us that his stupidity was the root of his biographical greatness. One suspects that there must have been some other root as well, or great biographers would be more numerous than they are. Yet there is an undoubted advantage in having the portrait of a thinker drawn by one who will give us all that he has seen just as he saw it, one who is not himself so original as to pick and choose, one who will not presume to arrange the perspective according to his own critical interpretations. There is too much of Plato in Plato's *Socrates*, and the *Memorabilia* is all the more valuable because Xenophon knew so little of his master's drift that he can be trusted not to have altered his words. Yet this sort of "objective" writing, as Nietzsche would have called it, is of little use when the subject is a man of action rather than a man of thought. Gladstone was both, and Lord Morley has done well to treat him in both ways.

<sup>1</sup> *On Compromise*, pp. 152-53.

<sup>2</sup> *Apologia*, p. 103.

A mere chronicle would have been as much out of place in the political history as the obtrusion of the critic himself in the record of his hero's inner or speculative life.

This duty of interpretation was all the more incumbent upon Lord Morley where he was speaking of great events in which he had himself played no inconspicuous part, and in which his recollection, combined with the papers placed at his disposal by the Gladstone family, enabled him to speak with an almost unique authoritativeness. It will be an immense boon to posterity that so elaborate an account was completed by one who knew so much and was at the same time so incapable of the smallest wilful distortion. But this book could not here be adequately discussed without entrance upon those matters of recent partisanship which I have at the outset pledged myself to avoid. Suffice it to say that the great qualities of breadth and grasp and charity, so notable in Lord Morley's other works, have not failed in his memoir of Gladstone. Perhaps in no single volume that could be named are the salient features of public life in the nineteenth century shown with such graphic power, such manifold provocation to thought, such a wealth of suggestiveness for him who will yet have to read the moral of that restless period.

One must dwell a little more fully upon our author's biographical achievement in a different field. Perhaps his finest literary work was to compel a revision of current English ideas upon Voltaire, Diderot, and Rousseau. In three striking biographies, marked equally by vivacious narrative and critical acumen, Lord Morley went far to rescue the just credit of these three remarkable men. Two generations ago a general obloquy had descended upon the French *philosophes*. Carlyle compared the record of their doings with the *Acts of the Christian Apostles*, pointing out that the latter could be read in an hour, while the former, expanded in inverse proportion to its importance, covered acres of typography, and would furnish reading for a lifetime.<sup>1</sup> This feeling was not due to that old Tory reaction against French liberalism which Carlyle himself has done so much to end. What Sir Henry Maine wittily called "Eldonine"<sup>2</sup> had been largely eliminated from the

<sup>1</sup> *Essay on Diderot*.

<sup>2</sup> *Essays on Popular Government*, Vol. I.

blood of a people which had itself passed through the purifying flames of a Reform Act and of Chartism. But such is the practical character of our race that we could approve what the French had done while alternately denouncing and deriding the abstract theories by which they had justified it. Danton and Robespierre were sooner forgiven by the British people than Voltaire and Diderot were understood by the British learned. It was easier to make allowance for the September massacres than for the impieties of the *Dictionary* or the wit of *Candide*. Even Napoleon could find more apologists for his imperialism than Rousseau for his social contract. For the excesses of revolutionary violence belong to human nature in general, while the type of thought in philosophedom belonged to that eighteenth century, against which the reflective spirit of the nineteenth was in fundamental protest.

In one respect indeed the Encyclopaedic group had got no worse treatment from history than it deserved. Clio is a revengeful Muse, and these men had provoked her much. D'Alembert in one of his foolish moments expressed a wish that all records of the past should be obliterated at a stroke, and the cynic will be quick to add that Rousseau's actual procedure in argument often assumes some such radical clearance to have been already carried out. "After all," exclaimed Voltaire, "history is nothing but a parcel of tricks that we play upon the dead." More important than these outbursts of pettishness is the fact that some of those who indulged in them were themselves historians, but that they wrote with a signal lack of what we now call historical sympathy. That human nature is much the same in every age, that no period is to be sharply divided into tyrants and oppressed or into tricksters and their dupes, that one epoch blends with the preceding and with the next in unbroken development, and consequently that the past must be sympathetically explained before it is censoriously judged, are lessons which the historical method has at length impressed upon us. It may be an excess of charity which teaches that to know all is to forgive all, but the maxim has a deep kernel of truth, and Voltaire was as much in need of invoking it for his own protection in the future as he was unaccustomed to using it

to temper his harshness toward the past. How slight was his power of projecting himself in thought into a society other than his own is obvious from the profane and obscene poem in which he outraged the fame of the virgin heroine of France. Neither he nor Diderot felt any difficulty in treating great stretches of human experience as areas of total blindness or of a cruelty that was unrelieved, in dismissing great religious and great social structures as the result of conscious and sustained deceit, or in supposing that some *philosophe* might by the power of his pen transform the reign of credulity into the reign of reason with the abruptness of the first creative word, "Let there be Light."

By an ironical fate the spirit which these men inspired built up the repulsive legend which long surrounded their names. They were estimated with little regard to their environment, to the tyrannies and frauds which wrung from them so passionate if so exaggerated an outcry, above all to the great work they did for human freedom and progress. Rousseau was classed with the rest by that insular scornfulness which disdained to draw fine distinctions among foreigners. It was known that the *Contrat Social* had lain on the table of the Committee of Public Safety as the fitting scriptures for the guidance of Couthon and Saint-Just. It was known that Hébert and Chaumette had gone forth to desecrate churches and slaughter nuns, breathing the slogan of Voltaire, *Ecrasez l'infame*. It was known that the Hall of Assembly had been adorned for its blood-stained decrees with the symbols provided by "philosophic" history, its statues of Lycurgus and Solon, its Roman fasces emblematic of free speech, and its altar emblematic of law. Englishmen, who had themselves beheaded one king and deposed another, reflected with national complacency that they had not done their drastic work amid such wild excesses or to such grotesque accompaniments as these, and, following Burke, they laid the chief blame on the *philosophes*.

Thus the characteristic watchwords of the Encyclopaedic men became terms alike of ridicule and of horror. Illuminism, light of reason, progress of the species, rights of man, had had their day. Those who had sent such explosive phrases abroad were looked upon as nothing more than unclean spirits, hating the reverent

and the ordered, athirst for the blood of innocent and virtuous princes, trampers on religion, scorners of chastity, robbing mankind of its most precious things in this world and its most strengthening faith for the next. Pious people wrote tracts about them, depicting the atheist deathbed as beset by fiends, and Voltaire as finding no place for repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears. This picture, drawn especially from English pulpits and accepted implicitly by English congregations, was of course known by the learned to be very remote from the facts. But the learned had their own quarrel with the "prince of persiflage," and they did not trouble to do him justice even in their own learned minds. Hardly a competent writer before Lord Morley set himself in a popular work to apply to the Encyclopaedists that genuine historical treatment which they had failed to bestow on the victims of their own furious propaganda.

Thanks to him, the reader can now borrow from any city library three books setting forth what manner of men those were who stirred France to the depths. He will find a candid emphasizing of those particulars in which they failed not less than of those in which they were triumphantly successful. Lord Morley had drunk too deep of the Romantic poets, of the modern anthropologists, and of the nineteenth-century historians to be under any illusion about the weaknesses of Voltaire and Diderot and Rousseau. But he has also brought home to us how, in a nation so unlike our own that practice waits everywhere upon abstract theory, these men were the very moving spirits of what was good far more than of what was evil in the proceedings of the Assembly. He has pointed out how they were the first to awaken opinion to the iniquities of colonial misgovernment and to the horrors of the slave trade, how they were the earliest critics of the abominable system of revenue under the ancient régime, how they denounced the barbarities of the penal code, how they thundered against the sale and purchase of decisions in courts of law. He has made us realize how much all Europe owes to their fearless campaign for a free press against ecclesiastical censorship. "It was this band of writers," he exclaims, "organised by a harassed man of letters, and not the nobles swarming round Louis XV, nor the churchmen singing

masses, who first grasped the great principle of modern society, the honour that is owed to productive industry. They were vehement for the glories of peace and passionate against the brazen glories of war."<sup>1</sup> In a word, he has reconstructed for us the setting amid which valiant, if at times intemperate, men had to fight for those elementary human rights which we, thanks in a great measure to them, now enjoy. For it was intellectual France a hundred and fifty years ago, as it is France today, that led Europe in the struggle for the franchises of mankind.

### III

Lord Morley could be a sharp literary critic when he chose, and he is himself a man of sufficient stature to make strictness a duty when one judges him. He once accused Lecky of habitual platitude and even proposed a little anthology of that historian's "vapid deliverances."<sup>2</sup> How would our censor fare himself if such anthologies were in fashion? He relates, for instance, in one place how Rousseau's system of musical notation was examined by a committee of the French Academy, and how the examiners exposed their own dense ignorance of the subject. Jean Jacques came out of the room cursing the impudence of *savants* who thought that because they knew other things they could sit in judgment on what they did not know at all. A natural comment, but could a more pompous platitude be pronounced upon it than the following? "His experience on this occasion suggested to him the most just reflection how even without breadth of intelligence the profound knowledge of any one thing is preferable in forming a judgment about it to all possible enlightenment conferred by the cultivation of the sciences without study of the special matter in question!"<sup>3</sup> Did not Lord Morley himself remark on a trite commonplace of Lecky, "Most true; excellent sense; but not startlingly new nor deeply impressive. As Rivarol said of his

<sup>1</sup> *Diderot*, I, 184.

<sup>2</sup> *Misc.*, Vol. IV.

<sup>3</sup> *Rousseau*, I, 98. I cannot refrain from quoting here the best parallel to such a sentence which occurs to me. It is the deliverance on the resurrection of the body which Newman for purposes of burlesque puts into the mouth of a Bampton Lecturer. "All attempts to resuscitate the inanimate corpse by natural methods have hitherto been experimentally abortive."—*Loss and Gain*, p. 22.

friend's distich, *C'est tres bien, mais il y a des longueurs.*" It is a specimen of that pontifically pedantic style into which our author tends to drop through the corruption of his own best quality. And other specimens might be produced at will.

Again, he has a way, as all preachers have, of proclaiming as axiomatic truth that which easily passes for such until a little thought shows us that the reverse would pass for axiomatic equally well, and until a deeper thought warns us that such subjects are not material for a priori axioms at all, that they are to be settled by historical inquiry into what has been, not by airy generalizations on what must be. There is an old dispute as to whether morality will gain or lose by eager anticipation of a future life. Hear Lord Morley settle it: "The decay of a theology that places our deepest solitudes in a sphere beyond this is naturally accompanied by a transfer of these high solitudes to a nearer scene."<sup>1</sup> "Those who no longer place their highest faith in powers above and beyond men are for that very reason more deeply interested than others in cherishing the integrity and worthiness of man himself."<sup>2</sup> Would it not be at least as plausible to say, "The strengthening of a theology that views this short life as the preparation for an endless future is naturally accompanied by a deepened concern about conduct, whose results are so momentous," or, "Those who believe that feeble man is made in the image of the Infinite God are for that reason more deeply impressed with the value of man's integrity than those who think of him as a chance product of mechanical causes and as the vanishing creature of a day"? "When the average of morals is low," says Lord Morley, "the need to prevent it from falling any lower is most urgent."<sup>3</sup> "Not so," one might reply. "When the average of morals is high there is a special stimulus and encouragement to preserve it, and when it sinks low a little lower is of slight consequence" Mill would probably have called each of these dogmatic propositions a "fallacy of simple inspection." They illustrate the sort of pitfall which besets him who would deal with this high theme aphoristically. And our author might have been expected to be on his guard, for it is he who has told us with real force: "The worst of maxims,

<sup>1</sup> *Misc.*, II, 118.

<sup>2</sup> *Recollections*, I, 89.

<sup>3</sup> *Voltaire*, p. 311.

aphorisms, and the like . . . is that for every occasion in life or perplexity in conduct there is a brace of them; and of the brace one points one way and the other down a path exactly opposite."<sup>1</sup>

This, however, is not the only respect in which Lord Morley's literary precept is better than his own practice. He has spoken of the peril that haunts superlative propositions. But has he escaped it? At all events in his earlier work he was exceptionally given to that gay, youthful exaggeration which makes a writer effective and picturesque at a shocking expense to accuracy and justice. Ferney, we read, was the center of the most universal and varied correspondence that any one man ever carried on.<sup>2</sup> For lightness, grace, spontaneity, you can find no second to Voltaire's letters at however long an interval.<sup>3</sup> Theresa le Vaseur's family were among the most odious of human beings.<sup>4</sup> Rousseau's appreciation of wit was probably more deficient than that of any man who had ever lived either in Geneva or in any other country fashioned after Genevan guise.<sup>5</sup> No man that had ever lived showed more sterling interest than Diderot in furthering the affairs of those around him.<sup>6</sup> In writing his political history Voltaire had before him the best attainable authorities and material, and no one was ever more diligent in putting them to the best possible use.<sup>7</sup> Kingsley had less of the historic sense than any other professor that had ever sat in a chair of history.<sup>8</sup> How can anyone be sure, or in the least degree confident, of these sweeping estimates? If the reader will underline each obviously rash superlative in one of Lord Morley's books, he will find in the course of an afternoon's perusal that the text has been considerably defaced. Yet how quick was our critic to stigmatize just this sort of offense, for example, in Macaulay!

Again, in his review of Mark Pattison's *Memoirs* he has told us that Pattison, though reputed to be of immense learning, was in truth no *erudit*. The reproach, such as it is, might be retorted upon the man who made it. We have indeed profuse evidence of Lord Morley's familiarity with wide fields of literature. The whole

<sup>1</sup> *Misc.*, IV, 77.

<sup>4</sup> *Rousseau*, I, 115.

<sup>7</sup> *Voltaire*, p. 289.

<sup>2</sup> *Voltaire*, pp. 318-19.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 319.

<sup>8</sup> *Misc.*, Vol. IV.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 322.

<sup>6</sup> *Diderot*, chap ii.



range of writers in France whose work prepared or expounded the Revolution he knows both profoundly and minutely. The great masters of English prose and verse have been for a long lifetime his constant companions, and probably few of his own time could pretend to so detailed and affectionate an acquaintance with the best that was appearing, both English and French, in the mid-Victorian decades. Moreover, that British school of speculation which began with Hume and was developed through the long line of Hartley, James Mill, Bentham, Austin, George Grote, down to John Stuart Mill, Leslie Stephen, and Herbert Spencer, he has assimilated with the thoroughness of ardent discipleship. His grasp of modern history, above all his knowledge of what Wellhausen called "the watersheds," is everywhere notable. But a man must be judged, not only in the light of what he has done, but in the light of that competence which he implies on his own behalf, and Lord Morley's claims are high. One must point out then how specialized he has been, how remarkable are the gaps in his attainment. Quite probably if he had acquired more his work would have been less valuable. Lord Acton, for instance, is a standing proof that beyond a certain weight of learning most heads become less sure and less steady. But, if one may be pardoned a Hibernianism, Lord Morley's writings show in a rather marked degree the traces of what he has left out.

For example, only a stray reference here and there in his *Recollections* suggests any interest at all in the masterpieces of classical antiquity. Sallust, Cicero's *De oratore*, now and then the *Iliad*, now and then a play of Sophocles, more frequently (and perhaps significantly) Lucretius' *De rerum natura*, were his resource when he felt in the mood for the ancients. But compare his diary, for example, with Macaulay's! His lack in this respect would not be so great a fault if he had abstained from rather crude judgments in a field which he had not effectively explored. He tells us that Mr. Asquith had a sounder training than his in Oxford days, and we may indeed be sure that Mr. Asquith would never have spoken of the Greek sophists as men "whose office it was to confirm, adorn, and propagate the current prejudice." Such a complete inversion of the truth about men like Protagoras and Prodicus and Gorgias

had, one would have thought, become quite impossible since the work of George Grote. And what would Lord Morley's Oxford tutors have said if he had written in a college essay what he afterward gravely published in the *Fortnightly Review*, to the effect that "before Montesquieu no single stone of the foundation of scientific history can be said to have been laid"? He adds indeed in a footnote that a germ of Vico's idea about cycles may be found in the remark by Thucydides that the future is likely to resemble the past! Among the things to be learned at Oxford—from such men as Mark Pattison—was just a wariness against this "human too much," a caution in declaring this or that doctrine to have made an absolute first appearance in the thought of So-and-So, a wise habit of suspecting the justice of that strong language which comes so quickly to the point of a facile pen. Scorn for the annalist and radiant enthusiasm for a possible philosophy of history are among the well-known phenomena of mental youth. Such scorn and such enthusiasm are likely to change places in the minds of old historians like the late Professor York Powell, who know how great a thing it is to make annals correct, and who feel about philosophies of history as Coleridge felt about ghosts, that they have seen too many of them.

#### IV

Perhaps the chief defect in Lord Morley's work is the incapacity he has shown to understand two great features of the period in which he lived—the neo-Kantian school in philosophy and the liberal movement among Protestant theologians.

It is hardly too much to say that for him the whole teaching of Emmanuel Kant was as if it had never been, and no student needs to be reminded how grave such an omission is from one's knowledge of modern thought. Over and over again we get a contemptuous allusion to "transcendentalism," as if it were a mere side aspect of intuitionist prejudice, a more or less ingeniously suborned prop for failing faith, one of the ramifications of what Voltaire to our critic's unceasing delight called "the Infamous." His remark in *Diderot* about judging men by a standard "half transcendental, half cynical"<sup>1</sup> makes one suspect that Lord Morley never knew at all what

<sup>1</sup> *Diderot*, Vol. I, chap. i.

Kant intended by the word "transcendental." The suspicion is borne out by many a reference to the same subject when he speaks of Coleridge, and in the papers on Carlyle and Emerson. His own point of view seems to have been tersely put in that aphorism which he quotes with evident relish, *Combien cette maudite metaphysique fait des fous!*<sup>1</sup> Nominalism he plainly thinks of as a triumphantly vindicated gospel.<sup>2</sup> Of the collapse of Mill in England beneath the criticism of writers like T. H. Green and F. H. Bradley he has heard as a disquieting and even an exasperating rumor, but of the grounds upon which that devastating attack rested he has little idea. He suspected that something serious was afoot in the world of dialectic as early as 1874, when he remarks of his old master's influence at Oxford that in that gray temple where they are ever burnishing new idols his throne may perhaps not be still unshaken.<sup>3</sup> And years afterward, when he dined with Thomas Fowler at the Athenaeum, he records in his journal the distressing news that at Oxford it is as much as a man's life is worth to mention the Canons of Induction! The pathos of this will be appreciated by everyone whose philosophical training has been subsequent to the great change in the center of gravity of the schools. It is not indeed wonderful that a harassed politician, absorbed so long in the very unphilosophic struggles of statecraft, should have been unable to keep himself abreast of the currents of abstract thought. But we are here estimating him not as a politician but as a writer. Not even Condorcet or Godwin was more convinced of the perfectibility of the world through reason than was the youthful Morley that Mill must yet reign until all his enemies had been put under his feet. There is little to show that this belief was shaken even after so much of the characteristic teaching of Mill had become hopelessly antiquated.

In one respect indeed we must remember that the disciple broke away from his master's leadership. Mill's posthumous *Essays on Religion* is the subject of an angry paragraph in *Recollections*. The conclusion that on the whole a balance of philosophic probability leans to the side of belief in God was not to be endured even from

<sup>1</sup> *Diderot*, Vol. I, chap. i, p. 226.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. especially *Rousseau*, I, 172.

<sup>3</sup> Paper on "The Death of Mr. Mill."

so revered a quarter. Hence it is pointed out to us with not a little acrimony that this view means a denial of the assured premises and the assured canons of evidence upon which the empiricist school reposed. So that after all Mill himself had insufficiently assimilated the "pure milk of the Millite word"! This is not the place to enter into any argument upon the great issue. It is enough to say that in those posthumous essays the empiricist chief gave a signal proof of his rare quality as a thinker. For Mill the poor pride of a symmetrical system had no compelling force, and the poor dread of inconsistency had no terrors. Not the least of his distinctions is just the candor with which he admits and even emphasizes each weak point that he has seen in his own structure of thought. Few men have been more free from that worst of all provincialisms, the provincialism of the system builder, the provincialism of him who has wedded himself, like Herbert Spencer, to a single idea as a key to every cosmic secret, and who forces every lock that he cannot turn. We know such men well by this time and have suffered much at their hands. Granted that Mill had absorbed from Kant a conception of personality which could not be fitted into the grooves of his old empiricism; granted that he had come to see, through the *Critique of Practical Reason* or otherwise, how inadequate were the sanctions of utilitarianism to explain the objectivity of morals, it is all to his credit that he should have set this in bold relief, caring little for its effect upon the assumptions to which he was formerly committed. Too many of the school of Bentham—and in this respect Lord Morley was among the number—resemble Mr. Galsworthy's English squire, in whom "a new idea invading the mind is met with a rising of the whole population, and either prevented from landing, or, if on shore, instantly taken prisoner."<sup>1</sup>

Again, amid his manifold assaults upon Christianity is it not singular that our critic takes almost no notice of that liberal school of theologians which would indorse to a great extent his own objection against dogmas of the past, but which feels able to reconstruct the faith in a form at once more consonant with the first Christian message and more in harmony with the results of modern thinking?

<sup>1</sup> *The Country House*, p. 128.

When he speaks of theology, what he seems as a rule to have in view is an intolerant system which teaches the existence of a God at once all-holy and all-powerful, whose activities are in no way conditioned by human personality and human freedom, a system which looks upon man as totally depraved, upon redemption as involving the intellectual assent to a mass of incredibilities, upon eternal punishment as the fate of those who will not pretend such impossible belief, upon morality as resting on nothing else than fear of hell and hope of paradise, and upon a visible church as supernaturally empowered on earth to bind and to loose at will. He was of course aware that each of these positions would be indignantly repudiated by a great body of Protestant Christendom. It is perhaps unfair to suggest that he preferred to level his own attack upon that type of Christianity which was most readily vulnerable, however obsolete he knew it to be in the minds of the best Christian thinkers. And it may be that he had clearly considered and definitely rejected the newer as well as the older apologetic, the faith of Maurice and Henry Drummond not less than that of Paley and Manning. But if so, he has nowhere given us his grounds, nowhere come to grips with the latest and strongest type of opponent, and hence must be judged to have written irrelevantly to the existing phase of the matter in dispute.

It is with the Church of Rome that he loves to argue; it is a Bossuet, a De Maistre, a Newman, that he constantly refutes. And he once used a very revealing phrase, "the Protestant dilution of the theological spirit."<sup>1</sup> It seems plain that he looked upon Romanism as the candid, sincere specimen of Christianity, and upon the Protestant as having whittled away for dialectic purposes such portion of the Roman creed as had become increasingly difficult to defend, but which entered just as intimately into the whole structure as the portion that was thus arbitrarily retained. Even granting, however, that this curious interpretation of Protestantism were sound, was it not incumbent upon Lord Morley to demonstrate its soundness, to convict in argument the most recent Protestant apologists of having implied in the theology which

<sup>1</sup> *Voltaire*, p. 206.

they kept just the same incoherences as belong to the theology which they rejected?

Instead of this the identity is airily assumed. And there is a further assumption, in which our author's usual charity of mind has for once forsaken him. Is it fair, is it even intelligent, to say that every man who signs a creed has pledged himself to regardlessness of truth? Do candidates for ordination "virtually swear that they will to the end of their days believe what they believe then"? Or do they simply affirm that such is their faith at that crucial moment, without attempting to predict its possible changes, and certainly without giving any guaranty that they will hesitate to take such steps as conscience may prescribe if that faith should not prove lasting? It is sheer hysteria in Lord Morley to speak of a great multitude of high-minded men as "taking oath to lead mutilated lives."<sup>1</sup> Perhaps the imposition of a creed is improper, but it is by no means so obviously improper as would be required to justify a tithe of Lord Morley's vehement denunciation. The Christian church is not a society for scientific or philosophical research. It exists far less for the investigation and discovery of truth than for the communion of those who have embraced a great conviction about life and destiny, who seek in the ordinances of worship a spiritual strengthening and comfort, and who could scarcely profit by the ministry of those who did not share in the main the same world-outlook, trust the same sources of power, and cherish the same hopes for the unseen. Personally I cannot see that if a multitude of Lord Morley's fellow-countrymen choose to maintain a religious institution of this kind, believing it to be for their own unspeakable benefit here and hereafter, they deserve to be loaded by him with reproaches and to have their clergy stigmatized as fraudulent.

It may be said, however, that the *gravamen* of his charge is the connecting of a man's livelihood with the rigidity of his opinions, and the stimulus which is thus given to pretense among those who no longer believe what they believed at ordination. It need not be denied that there is force in this, and that in the English church there have been not a few who would have availed themselves of a

<sup>1</sup> *On Composition*, p. 38.

good opportunity, like the French priests in 1793, to rid themselves of an office which they no longer needed, even at the cost of publicly avowing their own shame. Such occasional abuses are inevitable, for there are dishonest men among clergy and laity alike; but is it not remarkable that those who have done most to reduce the chances of such scandal are just those broad church leaders whom Lord Morley has not thought it worth his while to notice? The general subject of subscription cannot here be entered on. The difficulties of either amending or abolishing creeds will not of course be appreciated by one who thinks the whole content of Christian theology false to the core. But Lord Morley must allow for the standpoint of those who consider that content to be essential truth. And in recent years, under the guidance of broad churchmen, it has not been found quite impracticable to distinguish that element in the creeds without which the whole heart would be taken from the church's faith from those other elements upon which the widest difference of opinion may be allowed. To put the matter sharply and concretely, does any honest man think it just that Dean Stanley or F. D. Maurice should be branded as having led a "prostituted life"?

The truth seems to be that our author at the outset of his career took his apostolic mission a shade too seriously. He conceived himself by the time he was thirty-two as the protagonist in literature of a great but struggling cause. He would champion the scientists and the experimental philosophers against the serried hosts of prejudice, of ignorance, of theological obscurantism. In Matthew Arnold's phrase he would seasonably disconcert the blind worship of his contemporaries. But to attack the Church of England in 1877 as Voltaire had attacked the French church in 1750, to conceive the cause of English agnosticism as similar to that of French freedom, the antagonists as similarly malignant, and the weapons of ridicule as similarly in place, was just a little suggestive of the enterprise of the knight of La Mancha, who mistook the roadside inn for a moated castle within which there lay no doubt a damsel in distress, and who advanced couching his lance against the honest innkeeper in the name of the Lady Dulcinea del Toboso. Let it be remembered that those were the days when

Swinburne was publishing his *Hymn to Man* and his *Songs before Sunrise*. They were the days when the *National Reformer*, under the editorship of Bradlaugh, was assailing Christian doctrine with a levity which our critic himself would, I fancy, now pronounce indecent. Julia Wedgwood was not far from the truth when she said that the danger of reticence was long past, and that the danger of rash and exaggerated emphasis upon one's own opinions had begun to replace it. Leslie Stephen himself declared in 1873 that there was no article in the creeds which might not be contradicted with impunity even in the pulpits of the church. Yet Lord Morley wrote almost in the tone of a pioneer! Beyond doubt he has long repented of some flamboyant adornments by which his polemic was then graced. He would not, I think, speak today of clergymen who read as the inspired word of the Supreme formulas which are to them as meaningless as the abracadabras of a conjuror in a booth. If report speaks truly he was once accustomed to write the name of God with a small *g*, until some disputant with more sense of humor retaliated by writing Morley with a small *m*. Nothing like that appears in the *Life of Gladstone*. And one is confident that in later times he was sorry to read a certain passage in his *Voltaire*. It is that in which he derides the "shivering mood which receives overmuch poetic praise in our day as the honest doubt that has more faith than half your creeds." Then we hear about "the sentimental juvenilities of children crying for light." How curious that sentimental juvenilities should be attacked in a phrase so crudely juvenile! The writer of *Recollections* came to appreciate Tennyson in a sense that would make such stupid mockery freeze upon his lips. But there it stands, in the awful permanence of print, and as we judge Lord Morley's career we cannot but remember it against him.

Yet with all his faults he is a great man, and it may be long before we look upon his like again. I have spoken of him, as I am sure he would wish to be spoken of, with candid insistence upon what seems inferior as well as with appreciation of what seems best in the volumes he has given us. But I would not close without one word less of admiration than of gratitude. To use one of Lord Morley's favorite epithets, his has been a "far-shining" figure



in the world of letters. But it has shone farther still in the twilight regions of politics and government, for it has shone there by qualities in comparison with which the richest gifts of intellect and the eloquence of the most silvery tongue are impotent to move mankind. One judgment about him is just now admitted by all, and nothing in the doubtful future of criticism can in the least disturb it. In statesmanship Lord Morley must always be thought of as a leader of high courage, of unswerving integrity, tenacious of liberal principles, and clear-eyed in their application, yet preserving withal the most generous good-will toward those who differed from him, and thus sweetening the bitter waters of political strife with the spirit of personal friendship and ample charity. To say this, with the eager approval of both friend and foe, is to say much, but we can say more. He has set the pattern in public affairs at once of a noble scorn and of a noble trust, scorn for the arts of the demagogue joined to unshakable trust in the heart of the masses. One man like him can thus leave a mark upon democratic statesmanship that will not soon be effaced. He can so elevate the moral tone that it will be just a little harder for those who succeed him to depress it. Lord Morley has made some of us at least more assured believers than we were in government by the people, and if it be just to say that the test of a system of government lies in the stamp of leader which it brings to the front, British democracy when challenged by such a criterion would do well to rest its case on such as he.